DRAGONHEART™

JUNIOR NOVELISATION

WRITTEN BY ADRIANA GABRIEL

BASED ON THE MOTION PICTURE SCREENPLAY
WRITTEN BY CHARLES EDWARD POGUE
STORY BY PATRICK READ JOHNSON & CHARLES EDWARD POGUE

KYLE PRIMARY SCHOOL
KYLE

DRAGONHEART™

A NOVEL

WRITTEN BY ADRIANA GABRIEL

BASED ON THE MOTION PICTURE
SCREENPLAY WRITTEN BY
CHARLES EDWARD POGUE

STORY BY
PATRICK READ JOHNSON &
CHARLES EDWARD POGUE

MAMMOTH

Copyright © 1996 MCA Publishing Rights, a Division of MCA Inc
All rights reserved
Published by arrangement with MCA Publishing Rights
a Division of MCA Inc
First published in Great Britain in 1996 by Mammoth
an imprint of Reed Children's Books
Michelin House, 81 Fulham Road, London SW3 6RB
and Auckland, Melbourne, Singapore and Toronto
Cover design by Reed International Books Ltd
Printed in Great Britain

ISBN 0 7497 1727 0

This paperback is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is being published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

INSIDE THE TABLE'S CIRCLE,
UNDER THE SACRED SWORD,
A KNIGHT MUST VOW TO FOLLOW
THE CODE THAT IS UNENDING,
UNENDING AS THE ROUND TABLE—
A RING BY HONOR BOUND.

—THE OLD CODE

CHAPTER ONE

A sword flashed in the sunlight as it whirled down upon Sir Bowen. He caught his opponent's descending blade in his own sword and smiled, eyes gleaming like sunlit steel.

"Not bad!" Bowen cried, pulling back. He then moved forward so nimbly his opponent was quickly forced to the ground, Bowen's blade at his throat. "But not good enough to live!"

Prince Einon glared up at the knight. At fourteen years old, the prince was strong and a fair swordsman. He hated losing to Bowen even though it happened every day. Suddenly Einon kicked aside Bowen's blade, rolled, and sprang up, lunging at his mentor. Again the knight deflected the boy's blade by inches.

"Better!" Sir Bowen said, praising the young prince.

Einon was pleased. He smiled at Bowen and let down his guard. With a nimble parry, Sir Bowen's blade arced down, striking the startled prince on his shoulder with its flat side.

"But you'd still be dead!" Bowen laughed.

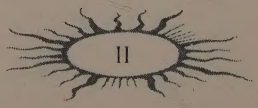
Prince Einon reeled back and, with a snarl, charged wildly at the knight. Bowen laughed again and leaped upon a crumbling piece of stone, easily avoiding the clumsy blows.

"Purpose, not passion, Einon! Fight with your head, not your heart!" Bowen said, reciting the Old Code to his student as he had done for years. Sir Bowen switched his sword from one hand to the other and took a quick drink from a nearby table of refreshments, all the while fending off the prince's sword. "Nobody ever found victory in the dirt!" Bowen remarked.

Einon charged again. Bowen allowed himself to be backed up to a wall where he promptly sat down, continuing to fight off Einon's blows with ease. "Mind if I sit? I don't seem to have your energy," Bowen teased. "Remember: nerve cold-blue, blade blood-red."

Bowen whirled up, and the fight progressed across a dirt bridge. Einon sliced at Bowen's legs. Bowen leaped up as the blade swished harmlessly under him—and back-flipped off the bridge.

Einon gasped. He could not see where Bowen had fallen. "Sir Bowen?" he called, his angry face suddenly full of concern. He looked down to find Bowen sprawled out on the ground. The knight looked unconscious. Einon



ran down to his teacher's side. Just then, the sound of furiously fast hoof beats pounded in the air. Einon turned around to see a rider galloping toward them. As Einon squinted in the sunlight, trying to see who the rider was, a sword rose, glinting at his throat.

"Dead again, Prince!" Bowen laughed. "How many times must I tell you?"

"Never expose your back to a corpse!" Einon and Bowen recited together.

The fencing lesson was over. Einon pointed to the rider. Bowen scowled as the rider approached. It was Brok, one of the king's fearsome knights.

"The peasants are revolting," Einon stated as the rider stopped in front of them.

"They've always been revolting, Prince. Smell one sometime," Brok replied from atop his steed. "But now they're *rebelling*." He turned to Sir Bowen. "King Freyne wants his son to witness his noble victory."

"There's nothing noble about crushing desperate, frightened men," replied Bowen. It was clear to the prince that Bowen disliked Brok.

"They're scum! The king commands you to bring him! And you can come, too, *nursemaid*," Brok added fiercely to Bowen. There was no love lost between him and Bowen. Brok whipped his horse and rode off.

"Why do you let him insult you like that?" Einon demanded. "You, a Knight of the Old Code! You're not afraid of him!"

"No. Nor am I afraid of his opinions. I expect no less.

He's the king's man," Bowen replied, his contempt for King Freyne, Prince Einon's father, all too obvious.

Einon beamed at his teacher. "When I am king, you will be my man, Sir Bowen."

Bowen clapped the boy warmly on the shoulder. "I am already your man, My Prince," he said affectionately.

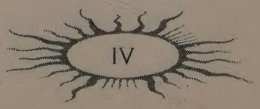
Brok galloped quickly back to the scene of the battle where King Freyne's armored and mounted knights were fighting the peasants. The clash and clang of swords and armor was deafening. Lances were thrust, horses were spurred, bodies lay everywhere.

King Freyne brandished his sword like a killing weapon. His eyes were hard. On his helmet glinted a gold circle: the crown. Emblazoned on his surcoat was a dragon's head impaled on a sword. Fully armored, the king spurred his charger to leap a burning barricade and burst through the rabble of peasants. With glee, he slashed his sword right and left, mowing down men armed only with crude farm tools. The peasant rebels were driven back through their own line of defense. Overturned carts, ditches—nothing would stop King Freyne on his bloody rampage.

High above the battle, seated on a hill, Bowen and Einon watched the bloody fight. Bowen was disgusted. Einon was fascinated.

"I wish we were down there," Einon said enviously.

"You don't," Bowen replied tonelessly.



"I do!" Einon insisted. "Just to see you in action, Sir Bowen. Yours would be the finest blade on the field."

"Too fine to foul with your father's slaughter," Bowen said disrespectfully.

Einon grimaced. Bowen had hurt his feelings. "He is my father, Bowen. And he is the king."

Bowen smiled softly. He had gone too far. But as a knight sworn to uphold the Old Code, it was hard for him to keep quiet about King Freyne's bloodthirstiness. "Yes, but when you're king, remember this day. Remember the difference between battle and butchery. And remember the Old Code. Bring back its forgotten glory, so that the crown will shine with honor once more, and never again will peasants have to take up arms against their king. Then you will be a greater king than your father." As Bowen turned to watch the battle with weary eyes, he did not see the dark glint in Prince Einon's eyes.

"I promise, Bowen. I will be a greater king." Einon pointed excitedly. "Look! Father's breached the village."

Down below on the battlefield, King Freyne continued to cut men down right and left. He grabbed a burning log and began to torch the thatched roofs of the village. The king whirled around to face a peasant youth, a bucket atop his head, who stumbled between two hayracks. A large, meaty paw grabbed the youth by the shirt, jerking him behind the hayracks.

The large peasant rebel who saved Buckethead's life had a red beard and a mass of red hair. He wore a leather headband. "Now!" Redbeard called.

From the huts and the houses suddenly poured more peasants, armed and dangerous. They attacked the murderous king with a fury. Realizing he was outnumbered, the king spurred his horse for the bridge—the only entrance or exit to the village.

"Close it, Hewe!" yelled Redbeard.

The peasant named Hewe led two teams that pulled spiked weapons from the hayracks in which they were hidden. King Freyne was trapped.

From the hill above, Einon cried, "He's trapped!" He watched in horror as the villagers closed in on the king. Freyne zigzagged his horse in and out of the crowds, torching everything with fire as he passed by. Before Sir Bowen could stop him, Einon was atop his horse, galloping toward the village.

"No!" Bowen leaped up on his horse to follow. As Bowen got closer to the boy, the rebels closed in on him. The knight ducked pitchforks and kicked away weapons as he tried to find the prince. But he could not see him through all the dust. "Einon! Einon!" Bowen called out.

Redbeard and his band of peasant rebels had surrounded King Freyne. They pulled him from the saddle and pounced on him. When they were done, Redbeard, Hewe, and the other peasants ran to defend the rest of their village from Freyne's men.

"Father!" Einon cried, galloping toward the fallen king. He jumped off his horse and laid a hand upon his father's nearly lifeless chest.

Stunned, Einon stared at his father's still face. The

prince's eyes caught the glint of the crown in the sunlight. He reached for the crown just as his father's eyes flickered open. Einon snatched the crown off anyway. Though dying, the king's reflexes were still quick. He grabbed his son's wrist. For a few seconds, father and son played a silly game of tug-of-war over the crown. Einon won—just as King Freyne groaned and died, his eyes glazed over in anger at his son.

As Einon pulled back from his dead father, Buckethead leaped off a burning building onto Einon. The tangle of their bodies rolled into the spiked weapon that had first trapped King Freyne. As Buckethead rolled off Einon, the bucket fell from his head, revealing a long cascade of fiery red curls. Einon jumped up off the spikes, gasping for air. His chest felt sticky. He looked at his hand to see it covered with blood—his own. The spikes had pierced right through him!

Einon's eyes traveled to the crown resting in a nearby mud puddle. He looked from the crown to his attacker, a girl with flowing red hair. Staring weakly, he sagged into the mud, his fingers locked onto the crown.

The red-haired girl stared down at him. Kara was about his age. The grime of battle and the rough peasant clothing could not hide her beauty. She heard someone yell, "Einon!" and saw a knight approach the boy. She ran.

"I'm here, Einon," gasped Bowen. "I'm here, My King." Einon took one last look at his teacher before fainting dead away into Bowen's arms.

OH AVALON! BRIGHT AVALON!
END MY SOUL'S DISMAY.
RETURN FORGOTTEN GLORIES
THAT ONCE HELD NOBLE SWAY.

—BROTHER GILBERT OF GLOCKENSPUR

CHAPTER TWO

The walls of the darkened chamber danced with the reflections of the dragon artifacts lit by a flickering candle. Queen Aislinn was on her knees before the altar, praying.

The voice of Brok interrupted her quiet prayer. "Dead, madam…King Freyne, your husband…slain."

The queen took the news stoically as she rose to her feet. Then her eyes fell upon Sir Bowen behind Brok, his face grimy and near tears, the crumpled form of her son lying in his arms.

"Forgive me, Queen Aislinn," Bowen said, his voice full of grief.

"There's nothing to forgive," she replied. "It's his father's evil quest for power that brought him to this untimely end." She gestured to a bed.

Einon groaned. "The crown…"

Queen Aislinn ignored him and gently removed his shirt, examining his wounds.

"He's beyond all help," Bowen said.

The queen was silent. She walked over to the altar and fingered a tiny gold dragon. "Not all help," she said to Bowen. "Not all…"

The group traveled slowly past the great stone ruins where earlier that day Einon and Bowen had engaged in their swordplay. Up a mountain trail, the prince was being carried on a pallet. Bowen followed Queen Aislinn. Brok rode in front.

Bowen was suddenly distracted by a strange and musical trilling sound. It was sad, melancholy. It came from somewhere deep inside the mountain. Einon groaned. Bowen shook the prince.

"You must stay awake, My Lord," Bowen said and began reciting the Old Code in the hopes that his words would keep Einon from slipping into unconsciousness. "His might upholds the weak."

"His word…speaks only…truth," Einon mumbled softly.

"His wrath…?"

"His wrath undoes the wicked," Einon and Bowen recited together.

They had arrived at the mouth of a cave. Queen Aislinn took a torch and started inside.

"This place has the stink of dragon," said Bowen.

"Come, and fear not!" ordered the queen.

Even the torch light did nothing to brighten the gloom. Steam wafted through the air. The bones of countless creatures littered the floor of the cave. The musical trilling continued.

Queen Aislinn approached humbly with her head bowed. "Lord! Oh, Great One!"

The trilling stopped. Bowen watched the glow, which became brighter, slowly outlining an uncertain shape. From the back of the cave came the ripple of movement.

"Are the stars shining tonight?" asked a sad voice, deep and strangely soothing.

"No bright souls glitter on this dark night," answered the Queen.

"Aislinn, daughter of Athelstun," said the dragon simply.

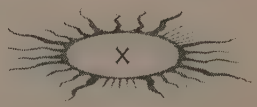
"Yes, Lord, whose people loved your kind and called them friend," the queen said.

"Once, long ago. No more," replied the dragon.

Bowen laid Einon down upon the stone ledge where the dragon stirred, never taking his eye off the winged creature's shadow. Bowen didn't trust the dragon. Einon sighed in pain, close to death.

"Freyne's child!" the dragon said. "Is this why you come, dragonslayer's wife?"

"Dragonslayer's widow!" the queen protested. "Do you forget that my people were driven out and slaughtered just like yours? I need your help. This child is not his



father. This knight is his mentor. He has taught him the Old Code. And I will teach him your ways," Aislinn promised, removing the bandage over Einon's chest and revealing the deep gash.

"The wound is deep," said the dragon. "Do you know what you ask?"

"I swear he will grow in your grace, grow just and good," Aislinn promised.

"*He* must swear," said the dragon. "Your sword, Knight."

The queen nodded to Bowen who reluctantly gave up his blade. Einon gasped as his eyes opened and saw the creature hovering above him.

"Fear not, Einon," said the queen. "He will save you."

"But first, boy, swear that your father's bloodlust and tyranny has died with him. Swear that you will live and rule with mercy. Come to me and learn the Once-Ways. Now swear!"

"I...swear," groaned Einon, leaning up to kiss the pommel of the sword and falling back into Bowen's arms.

"Einon! Einon?" Bowen yelled. "He's dead!"

In angry grief, Bowen grabbed the sword hilt. But as he yanked, the dragon's talons scraped down the blade with a screech, scoring a groove right into the hard steel!

"Knight of the Old Code," boomed the dragon, blowing out the torches in the cave, "witness the wonders of an ancient glory." The dragon lifted a scale on his chest, and using a talon, sliced downward. A red glow came from the wound. Not blood, but light. It flowed

into his cupped hand. He held the glow over the boy. "Half my heart to make you whole, its strength to purify your weakness. Live and remember your oath." A thin sliver of firelight sealed the wound, which glowed red with the light of the dragon's heart.

Einon's eyes fluttered and opened. He was weak. But he was alive. Bowen tried to apologize to the dragon for his doubts, but the dragon replied, "Remind him always of his vow, Knight of the Old Code." And he disappeared back into his lair.

Einon, the crown strapped to his shoulder, sat high atop his steed. His father's too-large sword was belted to his saddle. He was enjoying the sound of clinking chains and splintering stone as he gazed out over a stone quarry where chained peasants were working on a fortress Einon swore would be the greatest the world had ever seen. Brok rode past him with more slaves harnessed in a neck stock. One of them looked familiar....

"Hold, Brok!" ordered King Einon.

Brok dismounted. Einon looked at Redbeard suspiciously. Even chained, the rebel refused to be shamed. "Come to thank me, boy?" teased Redbeard. "You should. It was my sword that made you king."

Brok pulled Redbeard's neck back and put a dagger to it.

"No!" Einon yelled. "I want no martyrs. And death is a release, not a punishment." Einon smiled evilly at

Redbeard. "What an insolent gaze. Look good, dog. I'm the last thing you'll ever see. Burn the insolence out of his eyes!"

Brok picked up an iron from the fire. Redbeard stood proud, shaking his head at something near a boulder. But as Brok raised the iron, something slapped it out of his hand. It was Bowen's sword. Next, the sword cut through all the neck stocks, freeing the prisoners.

"Run!" Bowen yelled.

The prisoners scattered for the forest. From behind a boulder, Kara ran toward Redbeard. "Father!"

"Kara! Quickly!" yelled Redbeard.

Enraged, Einon drew his father's sword and headed for Bowen. "How dare you defy me?"

Bowen leaped to the ground and easily knocked the sword away. "Einon! You're unwell! You've been bewitched. Don't do this! Remember the Old Code."

"The king is above the Code!" Einon yelled.

Bowen couldn't believe what he had just heard. He yanked Einon out of the saddle, yelling, "You've forgotten everything I taught you!"

Einon shrugged away, moving toward his horse.

"Purpose, not passion, Einon. Fight with your head," said Bowen, deflecting the boy's wide swipes and forcing him on his back, sword tip at his chest, "not your heart."

His heart. His heart. His heart. The phrase rolled through Bowen's mind until it was almost as if he could hear the cursed heart beating. With a wail, Bowen stabbed his sword into the ground beside Einon. "No one

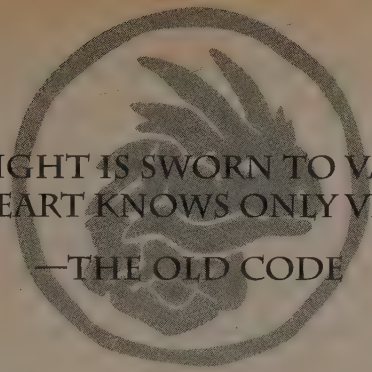
is above the Code. Least of all the king!" Bowen leaned down and kissed Einon. Tears welled in his eyes as he jumped on his horse and rode away.

Brok was about to give chase when King Einon said, "Let him go, Brok. We don't need him anymore." Einon sent Brok in search of Redbeard instead. When they found him, the hot poker was taken to Redbeard's eyes. He was blinded for life.

Einon's treachery had broken Bowen's heart. He became convinced that the dragon's heart had poisoned the heart of the young man, turning him evil. For that, the dragon would pay. Bowen armed himself and set out to find the dragon—and kill him.

Bowen retraced his steps from Aislinn's room to the cave they had gone to the night the exchange had taken place. But the dragon's cave was empty. Bowen was frustrated. He called out into the cave. "No matter where you fly, Dragon, no matter where you hide, I'll find you!" Bowen's words echoed furiously. "I make a new vow! I will spend the rest of my life hunting you down!"

In the distance, Bowen's oath was met by a sad trilling. Every mountain seemed to ring with the musical sound. Bowen leaped on his horse and spurred it away from the dragon's lair and in the direction of the dragon's voice.



A KNIGHT IS SWORN TO VALOR.
HIS HEART KNOWS ONLY VIRTUE.

—THE OLD CODE

CHAPTER THREE

"This is the tale of a knight
Who slew a dragon and vanquished evil.
So lost the world when lost its Code,
So lost in evil cruel.
But no one dared to bear the load,
And seek the golden rule…"

Behind the reciting voice, great fields of wheat waved gently in the morning breeze. Brother Gilbert, atop his mule, surrounded by scrolls and manuscripts, was composing a legend when he almost ran smack into Sir Bowen.

"Out of the way, Monk," snapped Bowen.

Gilbert looked up, his face going white. He pointed frantically to something behind Bowen. "Dra—dra—drag—"

"Yes! Where?" Bowen asked impatiently.

Gilbert pointed and Bowen gave chase, his horse disappearing over a wheat-covered hill. A painful howl was followed by a loud explosion of dust and wheat erupting into the sky. Then all was quiet. Bowen's riderless horse came trotting toward the monk...followed by Bowen holding a severed dragon horn.

Gilbert praised Bowen's skill up and down for saving his life, finally introducing himself as monk, scholar, scribe, historian, and poet. "Your servant, Brother Gilbert of Glockenspur."

"You have the poet's gift of exaggeration," Bowen said wryly, referring to the legend Gilbert had been reciting.

"Oh, sir! You should read my histories!" Gilbert said. "But you belittle your talent. That just now was a great victory for you!" he added, pointing to the dragon's horn.

"Just one less dragon," said Bowen coldly. "Hardly worthy of praise nor reference to the golden rule of King Arthur and the Round Table."

Their conversation was interrupted by the clattering of hooves. An extremely well-dressed man rode up, surrounded by three men-at-arms. "Well done, Knight. Our gratitude, mine and King Einon's," said Lord Felton. He turned to go, but Bowen caught his reins.

"Keep the gratitude," said Bowen. "I'll take gold, yours or the king's."

"Gold?" said Lord Felton, pretending to be puzzled.

"We struck a bargain," Bowen reminded him. "One dragon killed equals one pouch of gold."

Brother Gilbert was shocked. "Your honor has a price, Knight?"

"It has expenses! Honor cannot fill my belly or shoe my horse," Bowen said to Gilbert and to Lord Felton. "I ask a fair price for a fair kill."

"The monk is right," replied Lord Felton. "As a knight of the realm, it is your duty to protect King Einon's possessions."

"I'm no longer a knight of this realm," spat Bowen. "I won't bow down to Einon."

Lord Felton shook his head. "I should have known, foreign riffraff. Begone, vagabond, begone! Before I arrest you for…for poaching the king's wildlife!"

Bowen fingered his sword, but the men-at-arms were watching. He was outnumbered. Felton left. Bowen turned his horse in the opposite direction, but Gilbert was on his tail. "Come join me for an evening meal," Gilbert said to the knight.

"Come evening, I will be far from here, Monk," Bowen replied.

"So shall I," replied Gilbert with a smile, "for I am on a pilgrimage. May we travel together?"

"The road's still free—unless Einon taxed it," said Bowen.

Einon was right. His castle, so far over half a dozen years in the making, was greater than any castle ever built. Its unfinished walls arose out of the mountain, impressive and forbidding. The courtyard was buzzing

with the sounds of workmen and servants. Grooms attended to saddling horses. Falconry masters stood with hooded birds of prey perched on their gloves. They were getting ready for a hunting expedition.

Surveying his castle, King Einon was interrupted by the arrival of Sir Felton who was muttering something about taxing the roads to make more money for the kingdom.

"Ingenious idea!" Einon said to Sir Felton. "Only you would hide such a good brain under such a bad hat!"

The members of the hunting party laughed good-naturedly. Einon spurred his horse and they rode out of the gate at a fast clip.

Deep in the stone quarry, peasants toiled in the scorching sun, hacking into rock and earth. Guards kept watchful eyes on the peasants while they clamored for water, which was doled out by a lovely young woman with a wild mane of long, red hair hidden under a ragged hood. She made her way over to an old man and handed him a ladle of water.

"Drink, Father," Kara said, looking into the deep scars surrounding his blinded eyes.

"I told you not to come here anymore, Kara!" Redbeard replied.

"I am a disobedient child, Father. Drink!" Kara said as his gnarled hand caressed her face. She kissed the hand.

"No longer a child but a woman," said Redbeard.

"And even a blind man can see a beautiful woman. One day one of these guards will see it, too. Go home, Kara!"

"You are my home, Father," Kara replied, lifting the ladle to his lips. Suddenly an arrow slammed the ladle from Redbeard's hand. Kara looked up. It was Einon and his returning hunting party, now laden down with dead animals, large and small.

"Magnificent shot, Your Highness," said Sir Felton with a smirk. "What about the water bucket?" Einon notched another arrow and struck down the water bucket, splashing water all over Redbeard.

"Stand still, Father!" Kara whispered. Bravely she headed for Einon. He shot another arrow at her feet. She kept walking forward. Another arrow whizzed by, yet she didn't flinch. Einon lowered his bow, intrigued.

"You've got nerve to interfere with the king's sport," Einon said.

"There's no sport in tormenting a sick old man. I beg Your Majesty, let him go," Kara pleaded. "It's been years. Your castle is built. He can do you no more harm. For pity's sake, release him."

Einon stared at her. "Release him?" In a flash, Einon raised his bow and sent another arrow flying—directly into Redbeard's chest, knocking the old man to the ground.

"Father!" Kara screamed, running toward the fallen, crumpled figure.

"As I've said death is a release, not a punishment," Einon chuckled, watching as the young woman scooped up her dying father. Her hood fell off, revealing the long,

red hair. "Who is she?" Einon wondered. She was familiar somehow, but he couldn't remember how or from where. He spurred his horse and sped off.

Redbeard sighed, his head falling into Kara's lap. Einon never saw the defiant look she sent after him and his retreating party as she removed her dead father's red headband and placed it around her neck.

Bowen and Gilbert sat at a roaring campfire gnawing on roasted mutton. Bowen attached his latest trophy to his dragon-horn shield as Gilbert recited his latest additions to the legend he was composing.

"Oh, Avalon, lost Avalon, so the
legends say,
In mystery and mist, there valiant
King Arthur lay.
And resting with him, the brave,
bold heroes of his day.
Return forgotten glories that once
held noble sway."

Gilbert glanced at his one-person audience in excitement. "So what do you think?"

"Your mutton is very good," said Bowen. "But Avalon is a fable, Monk."

"A fable?" Gilbert protested. "That's not true! And I can prove it. I even remember how it goes: 'Upon his death, King Arthur was taken to Avalon, a land of mist, to

lie among his brothers, the knights of Camelot,' " Gilbert quoted. "And I will find Avalon on my pilgrimage!"

"And when you do?" Bowen asked.

"I'll pray for the society of justice and brotherhood, and for the return of the Old Code," Gilbert answered.

"The Old Code?" Bowen asked sarcastically. "No prayers can bring that dead ghost back to life."

"Why don't you ride with me to search for Avalon?" Gilbert offered. "All knights need a quest and..."

"You can believe in a fable if you wish, Monk. But my only belief is my sword, and I already have a quest—to slay all dragons. And one in particular," said Bowen, ripping off some meat from the mutton chop.

The next morning Bowen sneaked away at sunrise, riding out of a dark forest into the light along the bank of a shallow creek. He was almost in the clear when...

"Yoo hoo!" called a voice.

Bowen turned and frowned in dismay. It was Gilbert, spurring his overloaded mule toward the knight. "What are you doing here?"

Gilbert ignored him and pulled out a fresh scroll. "How do you prefer I write this?" he said, having decided the previous night that the dragonslaying Sir Bowen was still the perfect subject for his legend. In other words, he was not about to let Sir Bowen out of his sight for a second.

"I prefer that you write it anywhere far away from me," Bowen rudely replied.

Gilbert didn't get it. He continued to fumble in his bag, chattering away all the while about style and meter

and how he planned to write the legend. Bowen shushed him, saying something about dragon territory. Gilbert was insulted. "That's a fine attitude! I come to immortalize you in legend, and all you can do is talk about hacking and whacking dragons?" Gilbert got off his mule and squatted down near a rock, which he used as a writing desk. The rock shivered and twitched. Gilbert ignored it and went back to scribbling. "You're nothing without me," he said. "Heroics don't make heroes, legend writers do!" The rock shivered again. "The quill is mightier than..." The rock suddenly began to rise.

Gilbert fell to the ground, rolling and crashing into Bowen who turned just in time to see a dragon's tail disappear into the waterfall. Bowen spurred his horse and charged for the falls, but he was stopped by a battered breastplate flying out of the waterfall.

A deep, musical voice said, "That's all that's left of the last fellow who entered here uninvited."

"That doesn't frighten me!" Bowen said.

"No? Then how about this?" the voice said as it tossed out a suit of crumpled armor, bent arrows, and bones. "Or this?" Then a complete skeleton of a horse and rider came jangling out of the falls, clattering in a heap, the helmeted skull landing in Gilbert's lap. He shrieked.

"You know, I could go on," said the voice. "I have quite a collection."

"I won't be added to it!" Bowen insisted, dismounting and drawing his sword and shield. He headed into the cave entrance under the waterfall.

Gilbert scrambled to get it all down. " 'Into the mouth of death he strode, into the gathering gloom…' " A flash of flame was followed by a blast of steam rolling out of the falls. Gilbert stopped writing to watch Bowen approach the dragon.

Deflecting the blast of flame with his shield, Bowen grinned up at the dragon. All he could see of the creature was a hulking shadow. Bones and armor littered the cave—the dragon did have quite a collection of ex-humans! "Little damp for a fire, isn't it?" Bowen asked.

"Why must you knights who are out to make a name for yourselves always pick on us dragons?" the dragon asked in return.

"I don't need a name." Bowen held up his dragon-crashing shield. "Besides, I already have a collection of my own."

"Oh! So *you're* one who kills for money," replied the dragon.

"It's an honest living," Bowen said.

"Yes, one must live," agreed the dragon. "Well, since you seek a profit, we might as well begin."

"Don't flatter yourself," Bowen said. "It's not the profit, it's the pleasure." Bowen's sword rose into the bright beam of light, and the dragon's eyes widened in recognition as he saw the talon-scratched groove in the blade.

The dragon eyed Bowen warily. "Perhaps there will be less pleasure than you think!" The mighty creature swooped over Bowen and out of the waterfall in a gush of wind. His magnificent wings spread to their full exten-

sion, his hide glistening in the sunlight as he flew higher and higher into the sky. Gilbert gasped and leaned back so far to watch that he fell into the stream. Bowen dashed out of the falls, hopped on his horse, and galloped past the soaked Gilbert into the woods after the dragon.

At full gallop, Bowen yanked a set of knotted strings from his saddle pommel, as well as a chain spindle and a catapult. When he hit a clearing, he fired three bolo balls into the sky. The chain's bolos spread and widened as they spun upward. The dragon looked back just in time to see the bolos snare his right hind leg!

Bowen wrapped the chain around his saddle horn, but the dragon's power yanked the saddle off the horse—with Bowen still on it. Hanging onto the saddle for dear life, Bowen flew through the forest as the dragon sped on—the creature was leading Bowen directly into a huge, forked tree trunk! At the very last moment, Bowen turned to the side and the saddle was wedged in the fork of the trunk. The dragon's momentum bent the highest portions of the trunk, but the great tree was firmly wedged into the ground.

The dragon pulled against the chain, but the tree proved stronger. Bowen fell from the saddle. Looking up into the sky, the knight saw the dragon plummet downward behind a ridge in a blur of flapping wings.

HIS BLADE DEFENDS THE HELPLESS.
HIS MIGHT UPHOLDS THE WEAK.
HIS WORD SPEAKS ONLY TRUTH.
HIS WRATH UNDOES THE WICKED.

—THE OLD CODE

CHAPTER FOUR

Bowen staggered up and began to follow the trail of the chain where it lead over the ridge. Gilbert went in pursuit of Bowen on his mule, Merlin, composing as he rode. " 'The sword against the fang and claw, the flame against the shield…' "

Bowen, sword drawn, charged down into a small clearing where the dragon snarled and snapped, struggling to untangle the bolo from his ankle. "You're good. Haven't had this sort of challenge in some time," Bowen said wryly.

"Not likely to again," snarled the dragon. The creature's tail swooped out and swiped at Bowen. Bowen blocked the blow with his blade, but nearly lost his balance. The sharp-edged tail struck again, this time knocking Bowen back into a tree. Bowen ducked behind

a fallen tree just in time as the tail sliced the air, slamming down in between the two logs. Bowen smiled. The tail was now wedged in tightly and stuck.

"Overconfident, aren't we?" Bowen teased the dragon.

"Hardly," said the dragon. "But if you win, you'll be out of work." The dragon maneuvered to face the approaching knight.

"Ha!" said Bowen. "I'll keep going until I've exterminated every last one of you!"

"I am the last one," said the dragon.

Bowen, surprised, stopped dead in his tracks—and let down his guard. The dragon snorted a fireball from his nostril. Bowen leaped back as the fire exploded against a rock. He barely had time to duck when a second blast of flame whirled past him. "You're just trying to save your scaly hide with tricks!" Bowen called out.

"Haven't you noticed the dragon pickings are kind of slim these days?" the dragon asked.

Bowen tapped his shield. "I just got one the other day."

"So you killed the Scarred One? He and I were the last. Must have been a proud kill, warrior. How much gold did his tattered carcass put in your purse?" taunted the dragon. The creature's taunts brought Bowen closer, his foot very near the bolo rope on the ground—which was exactly what the dragon wanted.

"That's none of your business," Bowen replied.

"Couldn't have been much," said the dragon sarcastically. "And you'll kill me for sport. When there are no more dragons to slay, how will you make a living, Knight?"

"Shut up!" yelled Bowen, raising his blade to strike. But just as he did, he stepped on the rope. The dragon pulled back his foot, the rope snapping up and catching Bowen right between the legs. Bowen went flying, losing his shield.

The dragon reared up, opening his jaws, and opening them some more, until his mouth was extended open all the way and a black forked tongue slicked out toward Bowen. Gilbert closed his eyes. Bowen watched helplessly as the tongue descended upon him and everything went black.

When Bowen could see again, he found himself inside the dragon's jaws. The tip of his sword was tickling the roof of the dragon's mouth.

"If your teeth come down," Bowen told the dragon, "my sword goes up."

It was a standstill. Day turned into night and the moon rose into the sky. "If your sword comes ufp, ma teef come down," said the dragon.

Gilbert wiped his eyes. He was tired but still watching and writing, " 'Till moonlit night the titans dueled, In deadly combat…' " the quill slid off the parchment as Gilbert's head flopped onto it and he fell asleep.

Bowen crouched uncomfortably inside the dragon's mouth, propping his sword arm up with the other hand. He noticed a piece of cloth stuck between two of the dragon's back teeth and gave it a tug. It was a sleeve with

a skeletal hand still in it. Bowen recognized the ring still on the bony finger. "Oh, my, it's Sir Eglamore!" he exclaimed, tossing the hand away in disgust.

"Thanffs!" said the dragon. "Been stug ufp dere fa monffs! Could you ged your elba off ma tongue?"

"Why should you be comfortable?" Bowen asked. "My armor is rusting in your drool. And your breath is absolutely foul!"

"What da you expect wiff ode knights rotting batween ma molars?" replied the dragon. "Oh...ma mouf ith dry!" Suddenly the dragon began to cough. A huge ball of saliva rolled up the dragon's throat and smacked Bowen in the face.

Bowen wiped it off, grumbling. "Hey, watch it!"

"Sorry! It sheems we're in a bid ob a shtalemate, wouldn't you shay?" the dragon said.

"But I can go three days without sleep," Bowen boasted.

"Ah can go three weegs," the dragon replied.

"I'll stab you before I nod off," Bowen said.

The dragon rolled its eyes. "Und I'll chompf you. Marbelous. We'll kill each uvvah."

"What do you suggest?" Bowen asked.

"A troose! Ged out aff ma mouf and led's talk face-to-face," the dragon suggested.

More than happy to get out of the dragon's stinking mouth, Bowen started to edge downward off the tongue. But then he paused. "How do I know I can trust you?"

"Ah gib you ma word!" said the dragon.

"A dragon's word is worthless!" scoffed Bowen.

The dragon's tongue flapped up with a snarl, nearly tipping Bowen over. "Stubborn lout!" Bowen crashed down the tongue onto the ground, his sword clattering nearby. He looked up just as a scaly paw clamped down on him. The dragon craned his neck down, his eyes staring into Bowen's as he shook his huge jaws back into place.

"I should have known," Bowen said. "Go on! Kill me!"

"I don't want to kill you! I never did! And I don't want you to kill me!" the dragon stated simply. "If you win, you lose a career. If I win, I wait around for the next sword-slinger trying to make his name carving the life out of my hide. I'm tired of hiding in holes and skulking in darkness! I'm going to let you up now, and if you insist, we can finish this to its stupid end. Or you can listen to my idea." The dragon released Bowen and collapsed to the ground, exhausted.

Bowen, suspicious but curious, staggered toward his sword. He was so tired, he couldn't lift it. He dropped to the ground as well. "What idea?" he mumbled.

Sir Felton's mill was up and running at full speed at the crack of dawn. Peasants turned the large grinding wheel around a flat mill stone while guards bullied them to go faster. More peasants harvested the wheat in the fields. Up at the stone manor house, masons measured and carpenters pounded. And a pretty young woman smiled

as Felton handed her a small purse filled with gold. Sir Felton smiled back at her.

A young boy in the field happened to look up at the sky just as the dragon's shadow swooped across the ground he stood on. The boy turned and ran, frantically waving his arms and yelling, "Father! Father! Look!"

The peasants looked up and then scattered to safety as the dragon dive-bombed the field, shooting flames out of its nostrils. Peasants fled from the growing fire. The mill workers, spying the dragon, abandoned their posts. A guard lifted a whip to run after them, but the dragon was coming for the mill. The first fire blast blew the roof off the storehouse; a second blasted two tons of white flour into the air, covering everyone in white. The dragon swooped through the wreckage as cries, fire, and smoke filled the air.

Sir Felton quickly ran outside followed by the pretty young woman.

"Pesky critters, those dragons," said a voice.

Felton whirled around to see Bowen, armed to the teeth, sitting on his horse.

"Like big rodents. You can never seem to get rid of them, can you?" teased Bowen.

Felton, covered with flour, sputtered and coughed. "Thievery! Gouging!"

"You owe me money from the last dragon I saved you from, and I want that in advance, too!" Bowen insisted.

"I won't pay it! You hear me?" Felton hissed. "You blackmailing scoundrel. I should throw you in chains. I

S+DENIS(IN)VSTERVC

CRVCIATVS SOLDIES DE

IN·HVS·TRVCIATVR·WSQ·

DIES·IRE·DIES·ILLA·SOLVET·SECLVM·IN·FAVILLA·TESTE·DAVID·CVM·SIBYLLA·

S·TRVCIATVR·WSQ·DIES·IRE·

should..." Just then a wheel mill rolled past them, colliding into the side of the house and sending workers, wood, and stone flying in all directions. Seeing his new mansion getting damaged somehow suddenly changed Felton's mind. He yanked the money purse out of the young woman's hands and thrust it at Bowen. "When can you start?"

Minutes later, Bowen, with the help of a few peasants, had hooked up a catapult weapon that he called "a whacker." Bowen loaded the whacker with a heavy harpoon as the dragon came skimming over the lake. Calculating, Bowen adjusted the machine and then sliced the rope-trigger with his sword. The harpoon whizzed up into the sky.

Of course, the dragon saw it coming—they had planned it all out beforehand. Skillfully and harmlessly, the winged creature scooped the harpoon under its wing where his claw clamped shut on the shaft. Like a true actor, the dragon groaned and moaned, "Oh-oh-oh!"

To those standing on the ground, it appeared to be a direct hit. High above them, the dragon groaned and twirled in a fancy, dramatic death scene. Midair, the creature did a flip then a slow death-spin, its body plummeting below the surface of the lake with hardly a splash.

The peasants let out a loud cheer. Felton turned to his bully guards. "Get my money back!" he snarled. They started down the hill toward the lake.

At the lake, Bowen whistled for his horse. As it cantered by, he swung into the saddle and rode off,

weighing the heavy money purse in his hand and laughing.

Smooth as glass, the surface of the enormous lake showed not a ripple. Far down the river, the dragon's head popped up through the water's surface. On the shore the dragon spied a flock of white, fluffy sheep that made his mouth water. "Hello, little sheep..."

Bowen rode along the riverbank, counting the day's take. Suddenly the dragon floated by him, belly up. "Most profitable," Bowen said. "I should have met you a long time ago, Dragon."

"There is much gold in the world," the dragon replied. "When you have enough and no longer need me..."

"I am a Knight of the Old Code," Bowen said. "My word is my bond."

The dragon floated in a small circle, his seventy-five-foot-long wing span nearly grazing the edge of both shorelines. "You don't feel bad in any way?" asked the dragon. "Such lies are hardly correct for a Knight of the Old Code." He hiccoughed up a bit of white fleece.

Bowen angrily grabbed the fleece from the air. "That's debatable. Cheating people like Sir Felton is a service to mankind."

"Is it?" the dragon asked. "When you cheat the nobility, it's the peasants who feel the pinch."

"Not my concern," insisted Bowen. "Why should I stick my neck out for people afraid to risk their own?"

"So be it...Knight of the Old Code," whispered the dragon.

"If I wanted to feel guilty, I would have stayed with the monk," said Bowen nastily. "And what does a dragon know about the Old Code anyway?"

The dragon quoted, " 'His blade defends the helpless. His might upholds the weak....' " The dragon pulled itself out of the water. " 'His word speaks only truth.' "

"Shut up! I remember," said Bowen. "And that's all it is, a memory. And nothing, nothing can bring it back!"

"You sound like you tried..." the dragon said softly.

"And failed," replied Bowen. "So I no longer try to change the world, Dragon, I just try to get by in it."

"Yes, it's better than death, I suppose."

"Oh, is it?" Bowen spat bitterly. "For you, I mean. I would think you'd welcome death. All your friends are dead. You're hated and hunted wherever you go..."

The dragon froze. "Do you like reminding me? Yes, Knight, I do long for death...but I fear it, too."

"Why?" Bowen said. "Aside from your misery, what is there to lose?"

"My soul," answered the dragon sadly.

THE SKY'S UNTOUCHED WITHOUT THE REACH,
THE DREAM'S NO GOOD WITHOUT THE DARE.
AND ONE MUST FIGHT FOR WHAT ONE WANTS,
'TIS PURPOSE KNIGHTS ATTEND, NOT PRAYER.

—BROTHER GILBERT OF GLOCKENSPUR

CHAPTER FIVE

A large pig turned on a spit over the roaring fire. Servants hustled about balancing platters heaped high with food. Brok was arm wrestling two men at once.

Einon, his knights, and their womenfolk were having a rowdy dinner at Einon's castle. The only quiet person there was Queen Aislinn, Einon's mother. She sat at the end of the table immersed in a game of chess.

Suddenly, in the polished metal shine of a pitcher, Einon saw a figure armed with a knife creeping down the low rooftop directly behind him. As Einon turned the figure came flying, but he was ready. He caught the assassin, slamming him down onto the table, sitting atop him, and wrenching the knife from his grasp. The women gasped as fourteen knives were poised above the assassin,

ready to end his life.

"No!" Einon screamed, for the assassin was no he. It was a she. He stared down at the young woman whose flaming red hair matched the red headband around her neck. It was Kara! "I...know...you," he stammered. "The quarry! The blind man's child. A fine thing, isn't it, Mother?"

Queen Aislinn gazed at her son but did not say a word.

"First you beg mercy for your father's fate. Then you try to avenge it," Einon said evilly. "Now you'll share it!"

"In your kingdom, Einon, there are worse fates than death!" Kara yelled up at him.

"I'll think up something for you!" Einon growled. "Lock her up!" Brok and the others hauled Kara away. Einon picked up Kara's dagger and gazed at his mother.

Aislinn was still silent, watching him. She slid her queen over the chess board and took a knight. "Check," she said simply.

Einon jabbed the dagger into a hunk of meat and tore off a bite with his teeth while he stared at the roaring fire. Suddenly it hit him. Without another word, he flew out of the room and down a flight of stone steps into the dungeon. Kara was chained to the wall.

"I remember you now!" Einon said furiously. "Your hair, like fire—you gave me this wound!" He pulled open his shirt to reveal the angry scar across his heart. "I owe you. And I'll find a way to make you pay!"

Kara's eyes did not leave Einon's. Despite his fury, she was not afraid. She had nothing to lose. He had already

taken away the only person she loved on this earth. "Next time I'll pierce your heart!"

"You already did! And now this heart is very special. Like no other," Einon replied.

"It's a black, withered thing without pity!" Kara replied defiantly.

Einon narrowed his eyes and then called for the guard to remove Kara from the wall. He would drag her into the castle where he could keep an eye on her while he figured how to get his revenge.

High atop a plateau, not far away from Einon's castle, another meal was being eaten. Bowen skewered a skinned rabbit and tried to make a fire, but the wind kept blowing out the flame. The dragon watched in amusement then snorted. Two flames shot out of his nostrils, and the rabbit lit up.

"Hope you like it well done," the dragon said, wiping the black rings from his nose.

As Bowen ate, the dragon inspected Bowen's shield, ringed with the horns of many slain dragons. "You must have hated us very much."

"I hated one of you," Bowen said then pointed to the shield. "These I killed because I wanted to kill that one dragon. But I never found him. I never will. If you're the last, he must be dead."

"Yes.... Tell me, what was he like, this dragon that you hated?" the dragon asked.

"He only had half a heart," Bowen answered. "But even that was enough to pollute an innocent boy."

The dragon, forgetting himself, rose up in anger. "Einon was not innocent!" he said. "He polluted the heart!"

Bowen rose. "How do you know that? How?"

The dragon sputtered. He had almost given himself away! "Well,... all dragons know it! What was to become their hope became their doom. A spoiled, ungrateful child was given a great gift and destroyed it!"

Bowen did not want to accept this. "No! I knew Einon! I was his teacher. I taught him the ways of honor and right."

"Then he betrayed you, Bowen!" the dragon stated, lowering himself so that he was nose-to-nose with Bowen. "Just as he betrayed the dragon whose heart he broke!"

"That's a lie, Dragon!" Bowen spat.

"Stop calling me Dragon! I have a name!"

"What is it then, Dragon?"

"Well, uh, I couldn't possibly pronounce it in your language," replied the beast.

"Try me."

"Arr...er...awrrr...ow-w-wsh-s..."

"You're right," agreed Bowen, calmer now and feeding some wood to the fire. "I couldn't possibly pronounce that." His back to the dragon, Bowen heard a terrible groan. It was one of unbearable pain. He turned to see the dragon on the ground, wincing as a red glow pulsed

beneath the skin of his hurt shoulder. Bowen dunked his saddle blanket in water and laid it upon the dragon's shoulder. Steam puffed up with a sizzle and a hiss.

The dragon opened his eyes. "Thank you. It's passed now."

"What was it?"

"An old wound that acts up now and then," the dragon replied.

"Forgive me if I said...if I upset you..." Bowen stammered.

"It wasn't you," the dragon said. "Not you..."

Kara stared out the thin window holes, longing for escape. But she was trapped in one of the rooms in Einon's castle. And there was no way out. What was he going to do to her? A shadow fell over her before she could even begin to think of the revenge the king was planning.

"You!" Kara said, surprised to see Queen Aislinn. "How did you get in here?"

"I have my ways. I've come to help."

"I need no help from the beast's mother," Kara said.

"I was the mother of a child," Aislinn replied gently. "It wasn't his fault he was half made of his father's blood. If I had a choice, I would not have married King Freyne in the first place. But I did not have the choice."

"I would have smothered him in his crib," Kara stated.

"You think so now," Aislinn said. "But when you hold

a baby in your arms, you don't see the monster he can become. By the time I realized what Einon really was, it was too late."

"If this is the help you're offering, Your Majesty," Kara said, "then give me my dagger. Let me kill myself."

"Do not wish for death, my girl, when there is freedom." Aislinn went to a corner of the chamber and pressed a hidden spring. The hearth in front of the huge fireplace slid back, revealing a secret passage. Aislinn lead Kara through the opening and outside the stone wall of the castle. Aislinn pointed to a path leading to an iron door just above the surface of the water.

Kara turned to thank Aislinn. But she had already disappeared into the shadows.

Bowen watched late into the night as the red glow of the dragon's wound began to fade. The dragon opened his lidded eyes.

"Have you been watching over me all night?"

"I've been thinking,..." Bowen replied. "Mostly about what to call you. I've found a name."

"You say that as if you reached up and plucked a name out of the sky," said the dragon sleepily.

"I did. Up there," Bowen pointed. "See that cluster of stars?" The dragon nodded. "Do you see the shape they make?"

The dragon knew the shape well: The stars formed the outline of a dragon.

"A dragon," Bowen said. "We call it Draco. It means dragon in the scholar's language."

"So instead of calling me dragon in your language, you'll call me dragon in some other language?"

"You're right," Bowen said, lowering his head. "It's a silly idea."

"No," said the dragon gently. "I would be honored to be named after those stars: Draco. Thank you, Knight. Do you have a name?"

"Bowen."

"Thank you, Bowen." Draco offered a huge dragon paw. Bowen tried to shake it, his own hand dwarfed in the dragon's huge paw.

"Dogs! Fools!" screamed Einon, sending one of his guards flying across the room, clattering into a table and some chairs. Another guard staggered out of the room. "Idiots!"

A nervous Brok and the calm Aislinn watched Einon throw his temper tantrum. The king whacked another guard with a red-hot poker from the fire. "If you can't guard a simple girl, then leave this castle, you idiot!"

Brok stepped cautiously over to Einon. "Sire! There's no way she could have slipped past them."

Einon spun around, pressing the tip of his poker against the knight's throat as if he were going to plunge it right through. "What are you saying?"

"There are only two ways out of here and only one is obvious."

"Yes, but how could the girl have known?" Einon demanded, then his eyes shifted to his mother. He tossed the poker away. "Brok, get your best men!" Brok bowed and left.

Aislinn coolly returned her son's look. "I'll send someone to clean up this mess," she said. Einon suspiciously watched her as she left the room.

After escaping from Einon's castle, Kara went directly back to her village and tried to get the villagers to join her in an uprising against the king. But they did not want to hear her ideas. Her father, Redbeard, had already led them once in an unsuccessful uprising. They didn't want to go through it again.

"Listen to me! It's time to fight back!" Kara insisted to Hewe, her late father's friend, as they pelted her with vegetables.

Hewe raised a hand to toss a squash at her, but someone grabbed it from his hand. He whirled to find himself facing Bowen. "Why waste good food on silly words?" Bowen said, taking a bite out of the squash.

"I speak the truth!" Kara yelled.

"Truth is rarely exciting, girl, and it never wins rebellions," Bowen said. "Is there anything under that vegetable patch?" he teased, causing Kara to self-consciously wipe the tomato off her face.

Suddenly someone screamed and pointed upward in speechless terror. It was Draco! "About time," Bowen

whispered to himself. Draco landed on a rocky ledge a short distance from the village in an amazing display of fire and roaring. The villagers huddled in their huts, scared to death of the dragon.

"Where's the lord responsible for this village?" Bowen asked Hewe.

"Brok lives in a fine house six miles from here. He'll just blame any destruction on us and pluck money out of our pockets to pay for it," said Hewe.

"Well, I won't take as much money as he would. It was a fair offer. Take it, or I'll leave him here!" Bowen said, pointing to Draco.

Kara had had just about enough. "It's bad enough to bow to Einon," she said to Hewe. "But must you be bullied by some broken-down knight?"

Bowen glared at Kara then stared at one peasant surrounded by three plump daughters. "That's right. Maybe you'll sacrifice one of the village's lovely young maidens to the dragon instead?"

The villagers yelled their agreement—and promptly grabbed ahold of the troublemaking Kara. They tied her to a cart and rolled her out toward a rickety field. Bowen watched them in disgust and headed over behind the ledge where Draco perched.

"Who's the girl?" asked Draco.

"A nuisance. Get rid of her," said Bowen.

"Why?"

"The villagers are trying to make nice to you with a sacrifice—the girl being the sacrifice," Bowen explained.

"Whoever gave them that bright idea?" Draco asked.

"Never mind! They're idiots," said Bowen guiltily. "Just get rid of her!"

"How?"

"Eat her," stated Bowen.

"Oh, please," said Draco, spitting. "Yech!"

"My, aren't we delicate!" said Bowen. "But you ate Sir Eglamore."

"I only chewed in self-defense! I never swallowed," protested Draco.

"Well, then think of something quick!" Bowen said.

Draco swooped off the rock toward Kara, who screamed when she saw him. Draco reached out a claw to her. Kara immediately fainted. The dragon pulled the cart into the air, unhooked Kara, and dropped the empty cart to the ground, flying off. The crowd below cheered. As far as they were concerned, the sacrifice had worked—the dragon was gone.

KING ARTHUR UNTO THE VALE OF AVALON
WAS SWEPT TO LIE AMONG HIS BROTHER
KNIGHTS IN A STONE GROVE ABOVE A TOR.

—GILDAS THE SCRIBE, CHRONICLER OF THE
KING ARTHUR LEGEND

CHAPTER SIX

Kara sat atop a rock, soaking up the sunshine while Draco sang to her in his musical trilling voice.

"You're not like a dragon at all," she said, feeling content and warm.

"How many dragons do you know?" Draco asked.

"You're the first," Kara admitted. "But what a faker! Dragons are supposed to eat up maidens, not sing to them. I'll bet you don't do half of the terrible things they say dragons do."

"True. I never hurt a soul unless they try to hurt me first," Draco admitted.

"Then what were you doing in my village in the first place?" asked Kara.

"Good question!" came a booming voice. It was

Bowen. "You remember the village, don't you? What were you doing there, Dragon?"

When she saw Bowen, Kara let out a warlike whoop. The knight had left her to be sacrificed, eaten by a dragon! It didn't matter that the dragon turned out to be friendly, it was the principle of the matter! She leaped onto Bowen's horse and tried to attack him. She and Bowen tumbled from the saddle into the stream. Trying to peel the angry young woman off him, Bowen yelled at Draco, "You should have just eaten her!"

"Kara, this is Bowen. He won't hurt you," said Draco. "Bowen meet Kara." Kara released Bowen, but before they could say anything else, they heard the sound of hoof beats. Draco disappeared under the waterfall.

Einon, Brok, and a search party emerged from the trees. Bowen leaped in front of Kara to protect her, despite the fact that she had been trying to kill him just moments before.

It was at that moment that Kara remembered when she had seen Bowen before: He had saved her father from the first attack by Einon when she was a young girl. What had happened to that brave Knight of the Old Code?

"Ah, old mentor," Einon said evilly. "Seems you return to me with my lost lady."

Bowen turned to Kara who shook her head. "I think the lady wants to stay lost," he said.

"Not her choice, I'm afraid," replied Einon.

"My three feet of steel says it is," Bowen said, flashing his sword. He was daring Einon to argue.

Einon grinned and thrust his blade forward. In a clash of steel, former teacher and pupil engaged in a fierce battle. Bowen held his own, but Einon was younger and faster.

"Lie down, Bowen. Life has passed you by. You're a sorry leftover of a belief system that no longer exists," Einon taunted, making Bowen even madder.

"They used to be your beliefs, too!" Bowen said.

"Never! Never mine!" Einon spat.

"They were! You spoke the words. You made a vow on your deathbed!"

"I said them because it was what you wanted to hear!" Einon said. "I took what I needed from you. You taught me how to fight, and you taught me well!" Einon's blade ripped into Bowen's shoulder, sending him crashing back into the water.

But before Einon could deliver the killing blow, Draco appeared. The dragon lifted his wings, exposing the glowing red scar on his chest. Einon recognized Draco immediately and sprang for his horse in fear. Kara and Bowen watched Einon ride off.

Kara had watched the battle closely. She was impressed with Bowen's skill. Dressing his wound, she tried to talk him into leading her ragtag villagers against Einon and his men. He insisted that she had false hopes and that the peasants would only be massacred. Kara whirled away from him in anger—he was simply a coward!

Bowen drank in her angry beauty and called to Draco who had been flying overhead, "I'll see you at the village, Draco."

"What will you do, Kara?" asked Draco.

"Try to bring Einon down," she stated simply.

"Einon will not fall in my lifetime," said Draco, heading off to the next village, where he would perform one of his scary fake shows and Bowen would collect the money from one of Einon's lords. Bowen smiled sadly at Kara and left.

The money sack was being passed from hand to hand and each villager dropped into it whatever of value they had. Bowen stood by miserably as he realized that there was no lord here to drop heavy bags of gold into his hands and that Draco had been right—it was the peasants who would suffer.

"Wait!" came a voice pushing its way through the crowd. "This man is a fraud! This knight before you is no dragonslayer!"

Bowen saw Kara and was about to step forward when another voice said, "I'm afraid you're wrong, my child." Brother Gilbert had returned! He and Bowen embraced. "You couldn't put your trust in a better man," Gilbert told the crowd of peasants. "I have personally seen him slay dragons!"

"No! You don't understand!" Kara insisted. "He's working together with the dragon!"

The villagers were silent, then they burst out in laughter and continued to hand Bowen their valuables. Bowen nodded toward Kara and made a crazy sign behind

her back while he also laughed aloud.

Kara stormed out of the village in a rage. And at the next village her warnings fared no better. After a few more tries, she simply watched the show with the rest of the villagers, maybe she'd try again at the next village. But it was not to be—she couldn't compete with the drama of the dragon and the "heroic" knight. In the end, even she had to admit that Draco's aerial shows were definitely fabulous to behold.

Days later the group was traveling through a thick fog. Draco beat his wings in the air above them. Through the mist emerged the ruins of an ancient castle, magnificent and huge.

Draco called out, "Brother Gilbert! Here the Once-Ways still live as does the spirit of one who shared our name—the Pendragon!"

"Pendragon? Arthur Pendragon? King Arthur! Bowen, we've found Avalon!" the monk cried out. "Let the song of Excalibur, Arthur's sword, echo in our enemy's ear as we set out to fight Einon and his tyranny!" Gilbert cried out in poetic joy.

When they came upon the stone columns of King Arthur's legendary Round Table, Bowen moved silently from one to another. "Here was Sir Gawain's place, Sir Galahad's, Lancelot's..."

"Now that I have found Avalon, I am ready to fight, Kara," said Gilbert solemnly. "I'm finally ready to put my

pen aside and my other skills to the test against Einon. And you, Bowen?"

"Ruins and shadows won't win battles. You'll find that out when you try to raise your army. Your villagers were so brave they pelted you with vegetables," Bowen reminded Kara.

"We must start somewhere," Kara replied, ignoring Bowen's teasing smile. "Will you wish us luck, Draco?"

Draco was perched on one of the ruin walls. "Long ago, the wisest dragon among us told us to share our secrets with mankind. He told us to always watch over man; when he died, the night became alive with that star." Draco pointed to the night sky. "Through the years, his star was joined by others as the dragons died off. But then man grew arrogant with the gift of dragon-power and refused our teachings. All my life I've wanted to be able to perform one deed worthy of those who shine above—a great sacrifice that would reunite man and dragon and ensure my place among my brothers in the sky. But my sacrifice became my sin..."

"It was you!" Bowen exclaimed, suddenly realizing that Draco was the dragon he'd been searching for all along. "*Your* half-heart beats in Einon's chest."

Draco sighed. "Yes. My half-heart that cost me my whole soul. Even then I knew his bloodthirsty nature, but I thought my heart could change him. I was an idiot!"

"No more than I," said Bowen gently, "who dreamed of serving noble kings and nobler ideals. But dreams die hard...."

"Kara," said Draco, "I will go with you."

Bowen was stunned. He was now all alone. He walked out of the circle of stones and into the darkness without a backward glance. While the mist turned into pouring rain, he waited until the group had left and returned to the columns of stone. Suddenly a whisper cut through the rain. "Valor...valor..." It was coming from the stone columns. Was it a ghost?

"A knight is sworn to valor...." whispered one ancient voice.

"His heart knows only virtue...." said another.

"His blade defends the helpless...."

"His might upholds the weak...."

Bowen walked out from his shelter as the voices grew louder. From Lancelot's space at the Round Table came, "His word speaks only truth...."

Bowen looked up as golden light glowed out of a fifteen-foot tall stone statue of King Arthur. As it spoke, Bowen fell to his knees: "His wrath undoes the wicked!"

More ghost voices joined the chorus, the brotherhood reciting the Old Code as thunder and rain whirled around Bowen. Soon, before he knew it, Bowen found himself reciting along with them. And then the voices were gone, Arthur was gone, and Bowen was all alone. Again.

Back at her village, Kara was again trying to convince Hewe to help her, to lead an army against Einon. He was

arguing with her angrily and raised a shovel as if to strike her, when an arrow whizzed through the air and stuck into the shovel handle. Startled, both Hewe and Kara turned around.

There was Bowen, scrubbed and clean, armor sparkling, eyes glinting, sitting atop his horse with proud fire in his eyes.

Hewe said, "There isn't any fight against Einon!"

"I'm going to start one," said Bowen.

"You and what army, Knight?" snarled Hewe.

Bowen galloped to the top of the hill. "He'll join us!" Draco rose from behind the bridge, aglow against the morning sun. The villagers gasped. But it wasn't long before the peasants walked up to Kara and Bowen, one by one, and agreed to train for the fight against Einon.

For weeks, the entire village trained. Bowen showed Kara how to hold and strike with an ax. Brother Gilbert was found to be a natural with a bow and arrow. Each peasant was armed with some weapon. On the last night before the day they planned to strike, the group presented Sir Bowen with an object wrapped in cloth.

"Tomorrow we will look to your leadership, with this as the symbol of your courage," said Kara solemnly, as she unwrapped the gift. It was a brand new shield, shining and golden. In the center was an image of Draco, winged and magnificent.

Bowen was stunned and moved by their faith in him and by the love and admiration he saw in his friends' eyes. He knew then that they were ready to win back

their freedom and their kingdom. And unlike Einon, they had a dragon on their side.

THE RIGHT CAN NEVER DIE
IF ONE MAN STILL RECALLS.
THE WORDS ARE NOT FORGOTTEN
IF ONE VOICE SPEAKS THEM CLEAR.
THE CODE FOREVER SHINES
IF ONE HEART HOLDS IT BRIGHT.

—THE OLD CODE

CHAPTER SEVEN

The war room at Einon's castle was abuzz with voices. All the generals and lords were shouting over one another.

"There are hundreds of them! Armed and ready for a fight!" said Brok.

"Then let them have it!" said Sir Felton. "One of us is worth a hundred of them!"

"Fool!" said Einon. "I know the man who leads them. I will not underestimate him—or the dragon."

"Don't fear the dragon, my son," said Aislinn from the doorway.

"I fear nothing! Nothing!" said Einon. "Do you understand?" Then he pulled his mother aside and whispered, "It's just that sometimes I sense the dragon. As though he were close. But it's not fear!"

She motioned him to follow her out to the courtyard where five burly Tartars, armed to the teeth, stood waiting.

"A mother's gift to her son," said Aislinn. "Uhlric, Volney, Jugurtha, Odolfa, and Oram. The finest to be had."

Einon noted that one of them was a woman. "The finest what?"

"Dragonslayers."

Einon grabbed his mother's hand and kissed it.

The next day, from high above in the castle battlements, Einon, Felton, Brok, and the others watched the raggedy group of peasants approach the gates with Bowen leading.

"Madman!" Einon said. "Bowen dares defy me at my own gates! Well, today his Old Code dies with him for once and for all." Einon watched Bowen ride up and down and finally stare up directly at him. It was a challenge. Einon was furious.

Just then Draco swooped down out of the sunlight, exploding the battlements with fireballs, sending soldiers flying like toasted marshmallows. Einon's men ran to their posts. The Tartar dragonslayers put a huge and heavy crossbow in position, loading up a harpoon as guards scurried about. Every time Draco flew down, more fireballs exploded. The rebel peasants cheered as parts of the castle burst into flames, and stones began to fall. Einon slowly realized that he was trapped in his own

fortress. "We can stay here like sitting ducks or we can crush those rebel dogs!" he cried. He leaped down the stairs toward the courtyard followed by his men. Soon Einon and his knights rode out of the castle gates. He drew the sword that had once belonged to his father, King Freyne. "Let's shear them like the sheep they are!" Einon spurred his war horse down the road, charging the peasants. Bowen saw the king approaching and told the peasants to head for the forest. With Einon's men in hot pursuit of the peasants, Bowen slipped away unnoticed in the opposite direction.

The peasants were protected by the trees when Einon's men came into the forest howling cries of war. But Einon had made a mistake. Behind him, above on a ridge, Bowen pulled his horse to a stop. "Now!" yelled Bowen.

Behind Einon's cavalry, a rebel dipped a lighted torch into a pit surrounding Einon's men on all sides. The king's horses began to panic as fire rose around them. Hundreds of peasants charged from every side.

"It's a trap!" Einon cried. "Scatter or die!" Einon leaped his horse over the fire. Others followed him. Rebel arrows flew at them out of the forest and from behind bushes, Gilbert's among them. Kara was so busy expertly fighting off attackers with her ax that she didn't see two more men coming toward her—but Bowen did. Between the two of them, all four attackers hit the ground.

From the castle walls the remaining Tartar dragon-slayers oversaw the loading of sharp, barbed hooks into catapults. "Now!" yelled Volney, and the hook was sent

flying into the air at Draco. But Draco was ready. With his right wing, he caught the hook and yanked it hard. The bolts fastening the catapults came undone and two more dragonslayers were finished.

Below on the field, Einon had already ordered his men to retreat. Bowen and Kara saw him fly by atop his steed. "Gilbert, stop him!" yelled Bowen. Gilbert drew back his arrow and aimed, the shot piercing Einon through his armor and deep into his heart. But he did not fall! He didn't even seem to feel the pain!

At the exact same instant, Draco suddenly recoiled midair and grasped his chest. He howled in pain. This time he was not faking. He fell directly inside the castle walls. "Draco!" yelled Bowen. Kara watched Bowen run after Einon as she remembered Draco's words: "Einon will not fall in my lifetime."

Einon watched Draco fall into his castle. He looked at the arrow in his chest and calmly pulled it out. Then he spurred his horse and headed for his three remaining dragonslayers. Inside the castle walls, the dragonslayers were chaining up Draco. Then they swarmed in on the creature, ready to stab Draco to death.

"No!" yelled Einon. "I want it alive!" He got off his horse. "I want this dragon alive and safe, safe forever, for then I will be safe forever."

"No!" moaned Draco as he watched Einon leave. From within the king's castle, only one human gazed upon Draco with pity—it was Aislinn.

Deep in the forest, Hewe and his rebels weren't

thinking of Draco, they were enjoying their victory on the field. They stood tall and proud—they were winning back their kingdom from the cruel king. But the fight was not yet over.

"I'm going to save the dragon," said Bowen. "Who's going with me?" Kara and Gilbert went to fetch their horses and the three headed for the castle.

Inside the castle, Draco saw a shadow approach him. "Come from the shadows, Aislinn," he said. "Stand where I can see you."

Aislinn came forth, holding a dagger in her hand. "Do you know why I have come?" Draco nodded. "A sorry end awaits you...."

"It's the only end," said Draco. "In giving my heart to Einon, I have taken on every pain and poison in his evil body. Even the pain of his death must be mine. I have waited too long."

"No one would blame you..." Aislinn began.

"I know, but getting rid of Einon would not get rid of evil in this world. I had to wait for a time when those who could remember the Old Code would rise again to fight evil. That time has come," Draco said. "Are the stars shining tonight?"

"Brightly, My Lord, brightly," she replied.

"Then there is light enough. My soul does not need to flicker above with the rest of the stars."

"It was my fault. For a mother's misguided heart you

gambled your own heart—and lost." Aislinn raised her dagger. "Forgive me…" A hand suddenly tore the dagger from her.

"I know why you brought me the dragonslayers, Mother," said Einon. "You wanted them to kill him. You wanted me dead."

"I wanted to correct a mistake I made years ago when I saved a young boy not worth saving," she said.

"How unmotherly of you," Einon said nastily.

Listening, Draco watched the shadows on the wall to which he was helplessly chained. He knew that Aislinn would never again be seen alive.

At the last moment, Hewe and a band of rebels decided to help Bowen storm the castle. While Bowen headed for the dragon, Hewe and his men would try to open the outside gates to let in their army.

Before Kara and Bowen went to find Einon, Bowen held her close and they shared a hug. In their short time together, they had become partners fighting fiercely for the same goal.

Hewe and his men fell upon the guards at the gate. They were determined to get inside the castle. Draco could hear the sounds of battle outside the castle walls.

Bowen and Kara found Einon resting in his room. Einon immediately jumped to his feet and a terrible battle of swords began. The clash and clang of the steel blades set off blue sparks in the night's darkness as the

fight took them out of Einon's room and into the courtyard. Bowen drove Einon up, up, up a dark tunnel.

Kara, meanwhile, was having troubles of her own. She had just crept through the wreckage of the dragonslayers' catapult when a huge sword-bearing shadow fell upon her. It was Brok! His sword knocked her ax from her hand, sending her crashing into the wall.

But one of the dragonslayers had left a giant ax nearby. Kara snatched it up and, with two hands, proceeded to defend herself. Using maneuvers Bowen had taught her, Kara swiftly hit Brok's sword out of his hand and finished him off.

Brok's last words were a whine, "By a girl? I was beaten by a girl?" Kara ran to find Bowen.

Through the dark tunnel, the fight between Bowen and Einon continued until they reached the tower room, which looked out over the entire castle and the surrounding countryside. The duel was fierce and the sound of clashing swords loud. Bowen drove Einon onto the tower's ledge, following him up onto a crossbeam. Skipping over planks of wood and loose stones, Bowen parried. Einon tripped and flew over the tower's edge—splashing loudly into the water cistern below.

Bowen headed back down the tunnel to find Einon, for Bowen knew that the king was immortal because of the dragon's heart in his chest. While the dragon still lived, so would Einon. No wound alone, no matter how severe, could kill Einon.

But Einon was nowhere in sight, so Bowen set about to

freeing Draco. "You should have let the dragonslayers kill me," said Draco sadly. "Just as the heart binds me to Einon in life, it also binds us in death. For Einon to die, I must die."

"It doesn't matter whether Einon lives or dies!" Bowen said. "Our rebels have stormed the castle. Alive or dead, Einon is beaten. We've won!"

"You will never win until Einon's evil is destroyed. And to do that, you must destroy me!" Draco replied.

"No!" insisted Bowen.

Kara trembled as she watched Draco and Bowen.

"Once you swore your sword and service were mine, to call upon when I needed you, whatever I needed," Draco reminded him. "I will hold you to your promise, Knight of the Old Code!" Draco, hearing something, paused. "He's coming to stop you! Strike before it's too late!"

"But you are the last great winged creature on earth!" Bowen began desperately.

"My time is over! Strike!" said Draco.

"You're my friend," Bowen said.

"Then as my friend, strike!" Draco ordered.

"I can't!" pleaded Bowen.

"Then I will make you!" With a roar, Draco lunged at Bowen with his huge, snapping fangs. Bowen ducked. Again Draco lashed out, trying to provoke Bowen, but again the knight dodged. "Fight back, dragonslayer!" Draco yelled, shooting a flame at Bowen that just missed the knight. "Defend yourself!"

Bowen threw his ax to the ground. "Pick it up!" Draco

ordered, as Kara bent to retrieve it. But a sword blade at her throat stopped her. Einon had returned. Bowen moved for the ax.

"Move and she dies!" Einon yelled, his arm around Kara. It was a standoff.

As Kara, Gilbert, Bowen, and Einon watched, Draco viciously sank his fangs into his own claw. But it was Einon who felt the fangs, felt the pain that made him drop his sword. Bowen, suddenly accepting what he had to do, charged toward Einon and tossed the ax at the evil king's heart. But Einon ducked, and the ax flew right into Draco's glowing red chest. Draco folded over in a heap. In one powerful move, with a yell of rage and sadness, Bowen yanked Einon's sword from him and buried it into the king's heart. Einon fell right next to Draco, his eyes slowly closing for good.

Draco, with one grateful look at Bowen, smiled widely as his eyelids flickered shut. Heartbroken, Bowen knelt over his friend. "What now, Dragon? You abandon us now that we're free? Without you, what do we do? Where do we turn?"

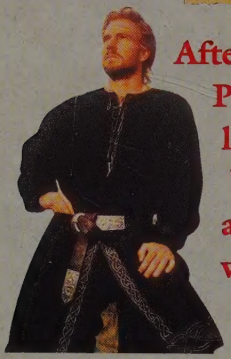
In that instance, Draco dissolved into a shimmering starlight, hovering in front of Bowen. Draco's warm and reassuring voice sounding like it came from the night sky, "To the stars, Bowen. To the stars..." Then the dragon's light floated above the castle courtyard, past the astonished faces of the rebels, into the night sky. Like a comet, it shot up into the cluster of other dragon stars.

Bowen and Kara watched the night sky as it exploded

into a blazing outline of Draco, the constellation of dragon stars. It seemed to all of them as if the new star glittered bigger and more brightly than all the rest.

The End

DRAGONHEART™



After being badly wounded on the battlefield, Prince Einon's life is saved by Draco, the last of a powerful, ancient race of dragons. When Einon becomes king he is an evil and tyrannical ruler, and disregards the wisdom of the Old Code, an ancient c of honour that once upheld the king

The valiant knight, Bowen, must join forces with D to lead the peasants to overthrow King Einon. But the kingdom be restored to honour and glory?

A dazzling epic adventure illustrated with full-col action photographs from the movie.

KP-325-329

£2.99

ISBN 0-7497-1727-0

9 780749 717278